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ABSTRACT

Many educators assume that close links between schooling and everyday experience are necessary for students to be motivated and to learn. That assumption should be reconsidered. To promote equality of opportunity and to develop scientific understanding, schools should help students break with everyday experience. Cognitive researchers recognize the value of breaks, yet show their ambivalence by advocating continuity; this ambivalence is particularly true of John Dewey. Ambivalence may result from recognizing that breaks with everyday experience come at a cost. When these costs are weighed against the contributions breaks make to equality of opportunity and disciplinary understanding the importance of breaks remains clear. A five-page list of references is included. (Author/JD)

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Institute for Research on Teaching

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Abstract

Many educators assume that close links between schooling and everyday experience are necessary for students to be motivated and to learn. That assumption should be reconsidered. To promote equality of opportunity and to develop scientific understanding, schools should help students break with everyday experience. Cognitive researchers recognize the value of breaks, yet show their ambivalence by advocating continuity; this ambivalence is particularly true of Ausubel. Ambivalence may result from recognizing that breaks with everyday experience are made at a cost. When these costs are weighed against the contributions breaks make to equality of opportunity and disciplinary understanding, the importance of breaks remains clear.

BREAKING WITH EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE[1]

Robert E. Floden, Margret Buchmann, and John R. Schwille[2]

During this century, American schools have increasingly come to be seen in a continuum of experience that spans family, community, and the world of work. (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). Secondary school teachers are urged to make courses relevant to their students' past lives and expected careers. Elementary school teachers are told to stress the everyday usefulness of mathematics and spelling. Many educators assume that without such links to everyday life students will not be motivated and will have difficulty learning.

Emphasizing continuity with everyday life, however, can confuse teachers' regard for students and their interests with the belief that the teacher must accept all of each student's personal beliefs and stress the practical relevance of school knowledge. We argue that emphasizing continuity conflicts with two central goals of schooling: promoting equality of opportunity and developing disciplinary understanding. Unless students can break with their every day experience in thought, they cannot see the extraordinary range of options for living and thinking; unless students give up many commonsense beliefs, they may find it impossible to learn disciplinary concepts that describe the world in reliable, often surprising ways. Everyday experience is unlikely to further these goals and often leads away from them, to inequality of opportunities and the deceptions of everyday life.

Schools should build on the fact that they are places set apart. If family, job, church, or other social institutions were to take responsibility for developing children's powers to break with everyday experience, the school's role would be less important. Currently, no other institution takes that responsibility, and schools are losing sight of their role in promoting

breaks. Hence many students do not gain the capacity to see their present realities and selves as provisional.[3] By emphasizing continuity, educators destroy some of the strengths the separateness of schools can provide.

In promoting breaks, there will be costs. School learning means losing the sense that life is seamless and whole and the comforting assumption that things, once learned, are safe from change and challenge. Yet whatever its merits, everyday knowledge is parochial and idiosyncratic; ironically, it conflicts with democratic ideals. The attractions of close ties to everyday experience and its traditions must be weighed against the benefits of breaking away from such experience for purposes of equality of opportunity and disciplinary understanding. In his recent book, Of Human Potential, Scheffler (1985) makes this point eloquently:

> The capability to learn is the capability to alter what one is and has been; it places the present at risk. Made quite general, such capability is consonant with the vision of a democratic society, in which learning is not restricted but opened wide, in which the risks of learning are more than justified by the human quality of the community sustaining them. (p. 122)

In the following analysis, we will clarify what constitutes desirable breaks from everyday experience, why breaks are necessary and desirable for two central goals of schooling, and how educators can foster such breaks. We will then consider objections to our argument that can be derived from the call for meaningfulness in instruction, research on cognition, and Dewey's philosophy of education. These objections are either based on educators' equivocation or ambivalence about formal, text-based instruction. We end by comparing our proposal with what might appear to be a similar call for school reform, the Paideia Proposal (Adler, 1982). This proposal actually revives notions of cultural deprivation and is based on taken-for-granted ethnocentric criteria of curriculum choice.

Why Breaks with Everyday Experience Are Necessary and Desirable

Everyday life is rich in vivid, compelling experiences that appear self-evident in their meanings. All of the attributes of everyday experience are two-edged swords. While giving learning power, they also restrict people's scope of vision; exaggerate the reliability and importance of everyday, close-to-home experience; and make it difficult to understand concepts from the academic disciplines properly.

Everyday life is not set up for learning that transcends its own boundaries and suspends its immediate purposes. Schutz (1962) and other phenomenologists describe immersion in everyday experience as the "natural attitude." The world seems centered in time and space around oneself, and objects seem important only for achieving personal ends. The organization and reality of this egocentric world is taken for granted by the individual and is not made the object of reflection.

Just as it seems that one's individual perspective gets at the nature of things, it also seems that one's social or ethnic group has the proper view of how things are and should be. These sociocentric and ethnocentric natural attitudes are even more powerful and pervasive. Sociocentrism can affect scientists just as it affects garment workers; ethnocentrism can affect whites as much as Hispanics. No individual or group is immune to the deceptions of the natural attitude.

These individual, social, and ethnic natural attitudes are deceptive because, although based on limited and particular perspectives, they do not seem to be interpretations but forthright apprehensions of the real world; further probing seems pointless (Buchmann, 1985). People going about their lives assume that their patterns of acting and thinking are not open to

question; they seem so obviously right that they become invisible. When these patterns are not seen, alternatives are not envisioned either, becoming instead inconceivable.

Even if alternatives could be considered, the natural attitude gives undue weight to the familiar, the close-at-hand (see, e g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980). In judgment, for instance, events that are personally close tend to be weighted too heavily. Tversky and Kahneman (1973) describe one inferential shortcoming associated with experience as the "availability heuristic." The problems with this common mode of reasoning are exemplified by the hypothetical case of a pollster who asks people to estimate the current rate of unemployment. Unemployed respondents, who encounter many other jobless people in employment agencies or welfare offices, will tend to overestimate the rate of unemployment. People currently employed, who spend much of their time among others who work, are liable to underestimate the unemployment rate. The relative availability of objects or events in memory tends to mislead judgments about their relative frequency, plausibility, and causal efficacy.

These limitations make it important to break with the natural attitude to overcome the limits and distortions of particular perspectives, with their ties to time and recalcitrant circumstance. Educational philosophers characterize this change of attitude as a move toward objectivity (e.g., Green, 1971; Peters, 1965). Greater objectivity means moving away from the point of view of a particular self or social group living in some definite time and place. Greater objectivity requires progressively more distance between oneself and egocentric or sociocentric patterns of thought and action.

Objectivity means seeing the world not from within but from the outside. The self or one's group is not seen as the center of things, but as only part of what one looks at. Thus, seeing things from the point of view of people in

general is more objective than looking at the world from one's own perpective or the perspective of one's social group, but is still less objective than the viewpoint of biological science (Nagel, 1979).

Objectivity allows us to see circumstances and events from more than one perspective, varying in distance to the contingent self; this is one part of its attraction. Another part of the appeal of this cognitive ideal stems from the sense that breaking with the natural attitude implies moving toward truth:

> The object is to discount for the features of our pre-reflective outlook that make things appear to us as they do, and thereby to reach an understanding of things as they really are. We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself. To grasp this by detaching more and more from our own point of view is the unreachable ideal at which the pursuit of objectivity aims. (Nagel, 1979, p. 203)

The movement toward objectivity thus requires both the ability to recognize the existence of other perspectives and the ability to select those perspectives that are least distorted by individual desire and local circumstance. Schools can foster both abilities in students.

Why Breaking With Everyday Experience Requires Guidance and Shelter

The image of "salutary shocks" provides a way of thinking about breaks that promote the movement toward objectivity. We usually are not ready to abandon the natural attitude "without having experienced a specific shock which compels us to break through the limits of this 'finite' province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one (Schutz, 1962, p. 231). This shock may happen when dreaming, watching a theater production, switching from one language to another, or hearing a joke.

A salutary shock is no simple discontinuity, but rather a turn that leads in a new and worthwhile direction. Its intrinsic worth does not depend on what comes before or after; still, it connects centrally with the development

of a person's self and powers. Shocks are more likely to be salutary if they occur in a setting created to make the most of deviations from the usual course. Ordinary life, however, does not screen shocks for their salutary effects, warding off those that are damaging or untimely and creating occasions for thought.

Schools can be places that turn shocks to advantage. A physical and social separation between school and everyday life can provide shelter from the press of immediate concerns, shelter that is important for acquiring the capacity to break with everyday modes of experience. Schools can be places for teaching and learning that exceeds socialization, adaptation, and dangerously simple internalization:

> The danger is that this thing is no longer easily accessible to reflection, criticism, modification, or expulsion. . . . One must say that there is no good teaching without internalization of what is taught and learned. but there is no defensible internalization without a simultaneous internalization of the competence to reflect on oneself and what one has learned. (Schwab, 1976, p. 37)

Detachment presupposed by objectivity is not a lack of emotional involvement or commitment to action but rather the sense that many self-evident modes of thinking and acting may have to be changed for good reasons.

Schools are responsible for giving children the capacity to break with everyday experience. Their charge to promote equality of opportunity depends on their helping students develop breadth of vision. Through promoting disciplinary understanding, schools can provide students with concepts and criteria for challenging the taken-for-granted and for selecting more appropriate patterns of thought and action. To carry out these responsibilities, schools cannot rely on content and methods of learning derived from everyday experience.

Everyday Experience Reinforces Inequality

More often than not, life teaches people that they have to fit themselves into the scheme of things. As part of their socialization, children learn what to expect from life. They learn how they are expected to act and how other people will act toward them and toward others. They adopt notions of what is true and right, often without much capacity for judgment and reflection.

Such expectations go far beyond manners and morals, stretching into the future of jobs, families, and community roles. Based on beliefs about what is appropriate or possible (e.g., on the basis of gender or social class), children may define themselves by projected futures that include a particular kind of education, job, and lifestyle. They also internalize local norms, patterns of power and authority, and views of how personal and collective decisions should be made.

These expectations are not the same for all children. Some see themselves progressing through high school, university, and professional school, imagining vacations in the Caribbean or in the Rockies. Others plan to escape from school at the earliest opportunity, to save their overtime pay for a new rifle and weekend deer hunting trips. Some envision campaign contributions to officials who will protect their interests; others expect to give their votes to whichever party will keep their streets free of snow; some do not vote at all, having learned from experience that life is hard and that they will have no chance to influence outcomes.

To have more equal opportunities, children must imagine selves and futures not determined by their immediate environment and ascribed characteristics. No matter how much a school is able to raise a student's achievement

test scores, the increase does little to equalize opportunities unless students can see and act on the possibilities created by such achievement.

Understanding what happens to oneself requires access to the behavior, thoughts, and knowledge of many individuals whom one cannot know personally. Such knowledge also helps visualize what could and should be. If broader knowledge cannot be mustered or if the views and decisions of powerful others are taken on faith, people are prone to manipulation and exploitation.

Everyday experience works against the ability to imagine other possibilities or to see the world from a variety of perspectives. Immersion in the natural attitude creates the false belief that the actual and the possible are identical and that the local perspective is an unassailable standard for interpreting the world.

Everyday Concepts Fail to Lead to Disciplinary Understandings

The academic disciplines provide alternative perspectives that draw on accumulated, systematically tested, and imagined human experience. They are also guides in reflection that prevents people from falling into the relativistic trap of believing that all perspectives have equal merit.[4] As with the goal of equal opportunity, reaching the goal of disciplinary understanding is frustrated by everyday experience.

Students enter school with concepts and methods for understanding and acting on the world around them. They have ideas about physical principles and about people. But many of these "naive conceptions" conflict with disciplinary understandings. Moreover, some disciplinary concepts do not refer to everyday experience at all. Thus, when children first encounter science in school, it

> appears as an encyclopaedia conveying information about the world fascinatingly <u>different</u> from what [they] would otherwise suppose

> to be the case. The image of a stationary earth is replaced by that of a stationary sun, iron dissolves into arrangements of electrons and protons, water is revealed to be a combination of gases and the concept of undulations in the air of various dimensions takes the place of images of sounds. And [they] are introduced to other images which have no counterparts in [their] familiar world, the concepts (for example) of velocity, of inertia, and of latent heat. (Oakeshott, 1962, pp. 212-213, emphasis added)

Because of the human tendency to try to incorporate new experience into old frameworks (Mayer, 1979), students often assimilate school learning into their naive conceptions, even when those conceptions are not appropriate. (e.g., Clement, 1982; Nussbaum & Novak, 1976). This tendency is so strong that everyday conceptions persist, even in the face of instruction that contradicts them (Eaton, Anderson, & Smith, 1984; Smith & Lott, 1983). In part, their robustness may be due to the fact that everyday conceptions have served students well outside school (Viennot, 1979).

To learn academic disciplines, students need instruction that compels them to see the limits and distortions in their everyday conceptions, not instruction that encourages them to think that disciplinary concepts are mere variants on their everyday beliefs (Roth, 1985). The conditions under which students will give up everyday conceptions and replace them with disciplinary understandings are still not well understood. One prominent model of conceptual-change learning suggests that conceptual conflict and dissatisfaction with old conceptions are important prerequisites to induce change (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). This requires that students gain enough distance from their naive conceptions to see them as but one way of making sense of the world, and one that is not unassailable.

All Children Need Breaks

In stressing the drawbacks of schooling tied to everyday, close-to-home experience, we recognize the danger that our argument could work to the

disadvantage of working-class or minority students who currently achieve less, on the average, in school. If providing breaks makes school more difficult for students already at a disadvantage, it might create yet another situation in which middle-class students reap the greatest benefits of schooling.

Typical schooling is closer to the everyday experiences of middle-class students than to those of other children (e.g., Bernstein, 1975; Heath, 1982). Hence, some argue that, to eliminate the advantages for middle-class children, school should be made equally familiar to all children. In other words, some researchers advocate relying more on instructional content and methods that are tied to the home experiences of children from minority groups (e.g., for the case of native Hawaiians, see Au & Jordan, 1981).

Our argument, however, questions the educational value of everyday experience for all students. It is not directed toward those groups whose home experience is already largely discontinuous with what is expected in schools. Rather than trying to make schooling equally familiar to all students, schooling should be made equally strange. For example, if learning a Western language is supposed to be good for non-Western children, then the corollary must hold for Western children: Learning a non-Western language must be of value for them.[5]

Furthermore, middle-class homes may provide children with ways of talking that help them succeed at typical school tasks (Bernstein, 1975). But having those ways of talking is by no means the same as possessing the ability to break with the natural attitude or to appraise alternative perspectives using concepts from the academic disciplines. We contend that schools should enable all students to break with their everyday experience; not that all students should come to share the everyday experience of one segment of the population.

Everyday Experience Is Not All Bad

We have belabored the drawbacks of everyday experience, in part because its limits and distortions are not sufficiently understood, especially among educators (see Buchmann & Schwille, 1983). Yet for detachment, as for most things, virtue lies in moderation and appropriateness: "The pursuit of objectivity is not an equally effective method of reaching the truth about everything" (Nagel, 1979, p. 213). Transcending personal and group experiences leaves behind things and modes of knowing that have worth; the objective picture of the world is only partial, appropriate for some, but not all, purposes (Rorty, 1982, Ch. 11).

Schools should therefore help students gain objectivity, but without denying that their everyday experiences have meaning. A proper balance must be found. Since everyday experience tends to support subjective and local perspectives, it is unlikely to provide that balance. Giving students the ability to find the proper balance presupposes their ability to break with everyday experience, so that they have some control over what emphasis should be given to different perspectives for any particular situation. The capacity to break with one's usual pattern of acting and thinking does not imply a permanent divorce from the everyday world or a loss of all personal meaning.

Effecting Breaks With Everyday Experience

For schools to develop students' capacities to break with everyday experience, we must change the content of instruction. Instruction should not rely on learning tied to the local context, but should rather draw more from materials set in a larger context. Teachers should be wary of introducing students to new ideas by pointing out their relations to everyday ways of thinking. Instead, they should immerse students in new material, building understandings within that domain. The content of instruction should include

skills that help students break with everyday experience, concepts and criteria for such breaks, and topics that go beyond what is familiar or directly useful.

Vygotsky's work (1962, 1978) lends particular support to an instructional approach that strives for greater separation--not more continuity--with students' extramural experience. From his studies of school learning, Vygotsky concludes that children do not acquire systematic understanding of academic subjects by seeing how these subjects relate to what has been learned outside of school.

Children can learn to use everyday concepts, but, according to Vygotsky, they are not consciously aware of these concepts and thus cannot work with them abstractly. For example, concepts of family relationships (e.g., brother, sister, mother) can be applied to concrete situations, but not to answer abstract questions of kinship (e.g., the identity of a brother's father's sister). Children eventually become conscious of these abstract relations, but may be confused because the concepts are "saturated with experience" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 168).

By contrast, children consciously learn concepts from the academic disciplines (e.g., the concept of "exploitation"); hence, academic concepts are easier to use in abstract reasoning. Lack of concrete reference allows children to keep those conceptual relations relatively clear. Children eventually make links to experience but make them within the abstract conceptual system. Vygotsky contends that this instructional approach favors reflection:

> School instruction induces the generalizing kind of perception and thus plays a decisive role in making the child conscious of his own mental processes. Scientific concepts, with their hierarchical system of interrelationships, seem to be the medium within which awareness and mastery first develop, to be transferred later to other concepts and other areas of thought. Reflective consciousness comes to the child through the portals of scientific concepts. (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 92)

Instruction that breaks with everyday experience need not, and should not, break with all of a student's previous knowledge. We will return to this point later. Learning involves developing connections among the various parts of a student's knowledge. Breaking with everyday experience means building logical connections between abstract conceptual systems and the particulars of a student's life rather than relying on concepts and connections learned outside the classroom.

Acquiring the ability for systematic reflection is a process consisting of several steps; as part of the process an adult takes responsibility for directing the students' learning. First the child is led through the steps of some task, without being able to do the task alone and presumably not understanding why the individual steps are being taken. As children learn to repeat these steps habitually, they learn to do the task independently. More important, each child also learns, somehow, why the steps are being taken, thus gaining the ability to modify the steps to fit different situations.

People do not understand clearly how children make the transition from performance without comprehension to independent appropriate action. In a study of the directions mothers give when teaching their preschool children, Wertsch (1979) suggests that children are motivated to make sense of things they do, so that doing a strange task creates the incentive to make sense of it:

> Other-regulation by means of uninterpretable directives seems to be an important way of "luring" the child further and further into the communication by building up his/her definition of the situation. . . . They [the mothers] use directives which require a definition of the situation somewhat beyond the child's level and then coach the child on how to respond. . . . The child comes to understand the task situation as a result of behaving (under someone else's guidance) as if she/he understood it and of trying to create a coherent account of the relationship between speech and action. (pp.20-21)

School instruction could likewise "lure" students into initially unfamiliar subject matter. Students need not always understand the material they are

engaged with as they go along. Instead, important learning can occur through working in new areas without an initial understanding of associated concepts and procedures or without being able to make sense of new material in terms of prior understanding. Coaching and imitation are important elements in these conceptual and behavioral changes.

This argument applies to learning in the liberal arts as well as to learning scientific or moral concepts. Some have argued, for example, that learning what good literature is and what it can give (e.g., offering people a perspective on their own situations) depends on a leap into reading good literature, starting without a clear idea of what it may provide (Whaley, 1984). Peters (1965) makes a similar case for the benefits of university education: Universities attract students with the promise of material benefits but actually deliver things--including the capacity to stand back from the particulars of everyday experience--that students will only appreciate once they have made them their own. The argument applies to moral education as well: Students must first acquire moral habits before they can come to behave morally for good reasons.

In many areas of instruction, students can transcend their current ways of thinking and acting by first acquiring habits with components they can imitate but whose purpose they initially do not understand. Such transcendence requires schooling that breaks with the everyday worlds of home and work. While this separation may forfeit immediate relevance, the loss is more than compensated for in long-term benefits. On-the-job training may bring quick short-term benefits by building specific skills, but may deceive the learner into thinking that mastering skills will always solve specific problems. Skill mastery will not help when seeking new jobs or coping with

changes in the current job. The work world prepares people for what to do in particular contexts, not for different or unknown contexts (Becker, 1972).[6]

The popularity of continuity as a principle of curriculum and instruction derives, in part, from commonsense beliefs that identify the value of education with its practical relevance; these have roots in the paradoxical traditions of thought that have shaped the American republic (Brann, 1979). In this century, psychologists, cognitive anthropologists, and John Dewey, the profoundly American philosopher-educationist, have elaborated and cemented the continuity principle in education.

Shouldn't Schooling Be Meaningful?

The contention that breaks from everyday experience will make schooling less meaningful seems a straightforward objection. People argue that instructional content that is not meaningful will be difficult for students to understand and remember; students will not be motivated to learn irrelevant material. This reasoning promotes the belief that meaningful instruction should closely parallel everyday experience; however, this objection rests on ambiguity of the word "meaningful" (Floden & Buchmann, 1984) which has at least three senses. To call something "meaningful" can signify that it is related to prior knowledge, or that it is practically relevant, or that it is closely tied to everyday life.

In its first sense of being related to prior knowledge, meaningfulness is important; but this sense does not actually support an objection to breaks with everyday experience because these breaks do not require discontinuity with <u>all</u> knowledge. Breaks with everyday experience certainly can lead to loss of meaningfulness in the second and third senses, but the educational value of practical relevance and continuity, as we argue throughout this paper, is debatable. The apparent force of the meaningfulness objection

is based on the fallacy of equivocation: using the first sense of the word to argue for the crucial importance of meaningfulness, then switching to the second or third senses to argue that breaks with everyday knowledge are not defensible.

Psychologists endorse the first sense of meaningfulness instruction that relates to prior knowledge.[7] Thus, Smith (1975) writes in a cognitive psychology textbook for teachers:

> Several fundamental conditions must be met before the student can learn. . . . Some requirements are self-evident . . . but . . . another requirement is so obvious that it is frequently overlooked: there must be a point of contact between what the student is expected to know and what he knows already (p. 9). . . .
>
> The very absence of relevant context may make the acquisition of knowledge through verbal means alone either difficult or misleading. Facts are hardest to learn, and least likely to be remembered, when their relevance is not apparent to the learner. A listener or reader must be able to relate new information to what he knows already; this is comprehension. (p. 221)

At a general level, it is trivially true that things learned must in some way be related to some prior knowledge. Research supporting this sense of "meaningfulness" relies on an interpretation of "related to" that encompasses a wide variety of relationships, from simple associations to substantive links. The capacity to memorize a list of objects is increased by "manufacturing meaningfulness" through thinking of associations that are strange--for example, imagining a familiar walk and then associating each item on the list with a place passed during this mental journey. Smith comments, "The fact that some of the associations . . . among nonsense syllables or words may be bizarre is not a handicap; in fact, bizarreness often seems to facilitate recall" (p. 163). Research on memory for nonsense syllables constitutes another example of the broad interpretation psychologists give to "relationships to prior knowledge." These memory studies equate meaningfulness with familiarity, that is, sequences of letters that occur frequently in English

(e.g., str) are more "meaningful" to English speakers than sequences which are rare (e.g., tsr).

The argument for breaks with everyday experience would be damaged if such instruction were meaningless, in this first sense. But the breaks we advocate are with everyday knowledge, not with all knowledge. As seen in these psychological studies of meaningfulness, one can meet the general requirement for relationships to prior knowledge by interpreting "relationships" and "prior knowledge" in diverse ways. Hence instruction can break with everyday experience and still be meaningful.

Having instruction relate to subject-matter knowledge acquired earlier in school clearly fits this sense of meaningfulness. In Vygotsky's approach, for example, prior knowledge may consist of different conceptual systems. Luring students into unfamiliar areas will build relationships with some prior knowledge. Very likely, these relationships will be more "meaningful" than the bizarre associations or commonly occurring letter sequences by which psychologists support their call for meaningfulness.

The consistency between the concept of meaningfulness as a link to prior knowledge and as a break with everyday experience can be seen more clearly by noting that this is not an all-or-nothing relationship. Although psychologists occasionally write as if meaningfulness were dichotomous,[8] "there are differing degrees of meaningfulness, depending on the extent to which the material to be learned can be related to what the learner knows already" (Smith, 1975, p. 160). By working with methods and content different from everyday experience, students may begin with only a faint idea of what it all means, but that faint glimmer of understanding may be enough to make the instruction meaningful. Gradually strengthening significant relationships

with prior knowledge matches the picture of instructional breaks described in the previous section.

In its second sense of practical relevance, meaningfulness is widely considered a primary source of motivation for learning. This interpretation equates making instruction meaningful with showing students how instructional content can be put to use outside of school, either now or in the future; that is, meaningfulness in this second sense depends on an instrumental view of school knowledge.

Since practical relevance signifies relevance to everyday activities, meaningfulness in this sense is inconsistent with the breaks we advocate. If practical relevance were decisive for valuable and successful instruction, it would support a serious objection to making schools break with everyday experience. Developing motivation to learn, however, does not depend on showing the practical relevance of school work and may, in fact, be hindered by such an emphasis.

In his recent review of the literature on instructional motivation, Brophy (1983) emphasizes the difference between two types of motivation. With exogenous motivation, students complete tasks for reasons not linked to what they learn from engaging in the task; with endogenous motivation, students are motivated by the tasks themselves and seek to learn what they can by completing the tasks. Linking school tasks to activities outside school tends to develop exogenous motivation at the expense of endogenous motivation. Telling students of the inherent value of the tasks tends to develop motivation to learn. Hence the fact that breaks with everyday experience fail to provide meaningfulness in the second sense supports, rather than undercuts, the argument for breaks with everyday experience.

In its third sense of being closely tied to every day life, meaningfulness is a characteristic of instruction that builds on everyday modes of knowing and learning. Actually, this is a specialized version of the first sense of meaningfulness. Breaks with everyday experience, by definition, run counter to this requirement. Yet such meaningfulness has considerable intuitive appeal and seems to be supported by cross-cultural cognitive studies and research on everyday cognition.

Texts Versus Local Knowledge

Research on everyday cognition in Western and other cultures (e.g., Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Scribner & Cole, 1973) describes and appraises everyday modes of thought in ways that contest the value of breaking with them. Scribner and Cole, as an important example, argue for greater continuity in both the means and content of instruction. What is needed, they assert, is to

> bridge the gulf between school and practical life . . . to move everyday life into the school so that its subject matter and activitiess deal with some of the same aspects of social and physical reality that the pupils confront outside of school. . . . Education must be stripped from the schoolroom and made instrumental in traditional settings. (p. 558, emphasis added)

Other cognitive anthropologists study everyday thinking in situations such as grocery shopping (Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha, 1984), navigating (Gladwin, 1970), or selling fish (Hallpike, 1979). Their work draws attention to the many unschooled abilities people have and to people's general capacity for making sense of things. Like the third sense of meaningfulness, this research tradition emphasizes the importance of building on everyday modes of knowledge in school learning. Like supporters of the second sense of meaningfulness, these scholars suggest that practical relevance is necessary to make such learning worthwhile and motivating. Surprisingly, this research grows out

of a line of study that tends to support our argument for breaks with everyday experience.

Cross-cultural studies of thinking often focus on whether learning a written language is a central feature in learning to think abstractly (see, e.g., Akinnaso, 1981; Cole & D'Andrade, 1982; Goody & Watt, 1968; Scribner & Cole, 1981). This research tradition portrays the advantages of the written mode in much the same ways we have described the advantages of breaks with everyday experience. Instruction based on text can put people into contact with the unfamiliar, with what is different and distant in time, place, and culture. The oral mode tends to preserve continuity with local experience, with what can be seen, touched, or heard (Bruner & Olson, 1977-78; Goody & Watt, 1968). Bruner and Olson link this distinction between oral and text-based instruction to differences between everyday learning and the text-based mode of learning that characterizes schooling.

Bruner and Olson (1977-78) argue that skills for working with written material have three interrelated advantages. First, these skills enable students to see their current world as just one of a number of possibilities. Second, text-based instruction allows for more flexible and general application of what is learned. When learning is closely tied to the local context, it is more difficult to adapt or to strike out in new directions. Third, the skills learned through text-based instruction increase students' tendency to be analytic. Oral lore requires memorization and is structured for this purpose; oral arguments are hard to pin down and often appeal to authority and the emotions. Through written argument, analysis, and critique, people can comprehend and judge reality and the claims of others.

Writing, however, can be closely tied to everyday life, and oral instruction can provide the basis for reflection or for thinking about an

unknown audience. The important distinction may be whether learners assume the role of spectator or participant (Britton, 1982) rather than whether the instructional mode is written or oral. In other words, taking a more or less objective stance may make the difference. Also, scholars interested in the "great divide" between oral and written literacy have recently concluded that it is not writing per se that benefits students, but some of the practices associated with formal schooling.

In their seminal study of the effects of written literacy, Scribner and Cole (1981) compared illiterate, literate-but-unschooled, and literate-and-schooled groups within the Vai people of Liberia to determine whether literacy accounted for, among other things, people's tendency to think analytically. They found that such thinking was only a little more prevalent in the literate but-unschooled group than in the illiterate group they studied.

Schooling, however, did dispose participants to be more analytic. Scribner and Cole (1981) attribute these effects to school instruction that is based (at least in part) on requiring students to describe their mental processes and give reasons for what they say. Teachers ask questions such as, "'What made you give that answer? How do you know? Go to the board and explain what you did'" (p. 255). These practices are consistent with our emphasis on objectivity and educational content considered in its own right rather than in terms of continuity or practical relevance. They encourage a shift from tradition and the taken-for-granted to explanation and logic.

Why, then, are these researchers so intent on tying schooling to everyday life? Why does Olson (1977), for example, criticize schools as "bookish, detached from reality, devoid of personal meaning, and useless practically" (p.69) and conclude his comparison of oral and written modes of instruction with an impassioned plea to reduce schools' reliance on text? Or why do

Scribner and Cole (1973), after enumerating the benefits of instruction removed from local contexts, argue that schools should strengthen their ties to people's everyday experience? (See also Akinnaso, 1981, p. 188.)

These scholars may be ambivalent because of the costs entailed in breaking with everyday experience. We have drawn attention to these costs, and they have been recognized since Plato, who was torn between recognizing the analytical value of written argument and feeling nostalgic about the continuity and wholeness of oral tradition (see Goody & Watt, 1968). Losing innocence through knowledge is a biblical theme as well. Some intellectuals, such as Rousseau and his followers, continue to yearn for "the peasant's simple but cohesive view of life, the timelessness of his living in the present, the unanalytic spontaneity that comes with an attitude to the world that is one of absorbed and uncritical participation" (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 61). If these primeval attitudes are goods, breaking with them brings losses that will be accelerated by education and literacy (see Akinnaso, 1981, pp. 169ff.).[9]

Ambivalent scholars may also believe that breaks with everyday experience will contribute to existing social and educational inequalities. This is a second source of ambivalence. As we pointed out earlier, these are not groundless fears. Where breaks are currently found, they are typically breaks for working class and minority children that result in excluding them from the benefits of instruction (Labov, 1982).[10]

Breaks are not salutary when they are simple discontinuities. They require a sense of purpose and a supportive environment compatible with goals of opportunity and academic learning; however, a call for instruction that breaks with local context and traditions may be a pretext for ethnocentric education. Musgrove's (1982) critique of contemporary schooling is a case in point. In his somewhat misleadingly entitled book, Anthropology and

Education, Musgrove draws on his teaching experience in colonial Africa and on an analysis of comparative studies of cognition to argue for schooling divorced from local context. Musgrove's argument is similar to ours, and he also notes the ambivalence we have just described.

But while we conclude that schooling should provide breaks for all children, Musgrove calls for breaks with everyday experience in schools only for some children, namely those from minority, non-Western cultures. He declares that "there can be no tincture of compromise over a core curriculum of Western science, Western mathematics, Western logic, and a Western language" (p. 138). Literacy, numeracy, logic, and science are indeed core subjects, but characterizing them as Western is historically inaccurate and the call for a Western language is plain ethnocentrism. Perhaps ambivalent scholars, such as Cole, Olson, and Scribner, avoided the logical implications of their own arguments because they feared they would be driven to Musgrove's conclusions. But these conclusions do not follow.

Dewey's Ambivalence About Continuity

Like the cognitive researchers, John Dewey recognized the value of breaks with everyday experience, yet he too showed ambivalence. Like those researchers, Dewey may have embraced continuity in part because he feared what the alternatives might entail. For Dewey, the most likely alternative may have been on overreliance on rote memorization of isolated, worthless facts. Dewey was incensed by the ways many schools blinded students to new ideas, destroyed their desire to learn, and killed their interest in books (see e.g., Dewey, 1938/1963, pp. 26-27). He also valued the sense of community lost in making the break.

Often considered a champion of tight ties between home and school, Dewey took a complex position on breaks with everyday experience. Consider, for

instance, the c ments in his emphatic, widely reprinted pamphlet "My Pedagogic Creed": "The school life should grow gradually out of the home life; . . . it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home" (1897/1964, p. 431). Forty years later, in Experience and Education, Dewey (1938/1963) writes that, for an educator, "connection with life-experiences" is a "fundamental principle" (p. 78) and "connectedness in growth must be his constant watchword" (p. 75). These ideas, spanning the period of most of his educational writings, demonstrate that Dewey emphasizes connections with everyday experience as part of his position.

Yet Dewey's view of schooling centrally features the advantages we have attributed to the power to make breaks. Educative schooling includes disciplinary understanding and "opens a way to a kind of experience which would not be accessible to the young, if they were left to pick up their training in informal association with others, since books and the symbols of knowledge are mastered" (Dewey, 1916/1961, p. 9). He also links mastery of academic subjects to acquiring a sense of intellectual method and objectivity; such learning implies the

> ability to view facts impartially and objectively; that is, without reference to their place and meaning in one's own experience. It means capacity to analyze and to synthesize. It means highly matured intellectual habits and the command of a definite technique and apparatus of scientific inquiry.(Dewey, 1902/1964, p. 341)

Dewey saw education as a journey into the unknown. Experiences are not "educative" if they only give students "greater skill and ease in dealing with things with which they are already familiar" (Dewey, 1938/1963, p.75). Moreover, Dewey believed that schooling ought not to be closely tied to definite future occupations, and he attacked plans for vocational education aimed to fit workers into existing jobs. He thought that vocational education should

make workers the "masters of their own industrial fate" (Dewey, 1915, p. 42). Dewey wanted to integrate occupational concerns into the education of all students, not to substitute academic learning with occupational skills for some (Wirth, 1974).

Dewey's emphasis on reflection resembles our call for the power to break with everyday experience. But we dispute Dewey's belief that education requires beginning with everyday experiences. Starting with everday experience can make it more difficult for students to make the break.[11] Dewey's main objections against providing breaks with everyday experience are founded on doubts about how these breaks would actually be implemented rather than on doubts about their worth.[12] Yet any educational reform may be carried out poorly, leading to undesirable consequences. This is a reason to urge care in making changes, not to abandon worthwhile aims of schooling.

All Homes Are Culturally Deprived

The belief that good schooling requires continuity is an invidious myth. Breaks with everyday experience are necessary for helping all children to think and act with a sense of method and ideas that reach beyond the immediately given instruction. While everyday life occasionally includes such breaks for some people outside of school, public schools are the primary American institutions that pay attention to equality of opportunity in assuring educative breaks with experience. In public schools the frequency and nature of these breaks can be controlled in the interests of learning, and students can be sheltered from the necessities of everyday life to bring that learning to fruition.

Although discontinuity is not an educational goal or guarantee of worthwhile learning in itself, schools are unlikely to further equal opportunity and disciplinary understanding if their curriculum simply remains within a

continuum of everyday experience. Whereas the ability to make breaks with everyday experience is valuable for all, such breaks come at a cost. We do not deny or minimize the pains involved in thinking and judging objectively, for objectivity brings distance from things intimately known and cherished. Nor is equalizing opportunities an unmixed blessing, for it disconnects individuals from their backgrounds. Yet there are pains also in misunderstanding or not understanding at all. Women, peasants, and workers would have suffered less throughout history had they been able to break with their everyday experience enough to distinguish between the facts of the matter and the beliefs interested others wanted them to hold.

We aim to recover the meaning of school as a place set apart, where truth and the social order do not coincide. This implies that schools must stress disciplinary understanding as a central goal of schooling, but must not confuse the goal with an attempt to return to a curriculum based solely on studying English or the classics of Western literature.

The distinctive features of our proposal are highlighted by comparing them with those of the Paideia manifesto, which bears a superficial resemblance to our case for breaks with everyday experience (Adler, 1982). The Paideia group advocates, for all students, a nonspecialized, nonvocational, nontracked education consisting of (a) didactic teaching in three fundamental branches of organized knowledge (language, literature and fine arts; mathematics and natural sciences; history, geography and social studies); (b) coaching to develop intellectual skills such as reading, writing, and problem solving; and (c) Socratic discussion of texts to develop understanding of fundamental ideas and values, such as liberty, equality, justice, and democracy.

Throughout the Paideia manifesto, organized knowledge is discussed as if the disciplines are more or less sufficient guides for curriculum choice. Yet, since these branches of knowledge include far more than any one student can ever study, much less understand, the Paideia proposal relies on two additional criteria for curriculum choice--tradition and continuity. The proposal emphasizes the study of traditional American society over that of other countries. It also advocates the exploration of the roots of the dominant American culture derived from Western Europe.

The emphasis on American society and Western Europe runs counter to our advocacy of breaks. It demonstrates an ethnocentrism most obvious in passages that deal with history and civics but which is present in other subject areas as well. For example, the Paideia group recommends instruction in the "history of our own language" (p. 24, emphasis added). To speak of English as "our own" language does injustice to the history of a nation of immigrants and excludes many American groups of the present day, such as Hispanics, for whom English is not the mother tongue.

Since the Paideia group implicitly suggests that some traditions are of more value than others, it is not surprising to find that the proposal revives the idea that some home cultures leave students deprived: "Preschool deprivation is the cause of backwardness or failure in school" (Adler, 1982, p. 37); "The sooner a democratic society intervenes to remedy the cultural inequality of homes and environments, the sooner it will succeed in fulfilling the democratic mandate of equal educational opportunity" (p. 39). Popular in the 1960s, this notion fell out of favor by the early 1970s because it made unjustifiable assumptions about cultural superiority and blamed the victims of inadequate schools for their failure (see, e.g., Persell, 1977).

The Paideia group's complacency about the everyday experiences of children who come from homes not stigmatized as culturally deprived is unwarranted. We propose a deprivation hypothesis that is general rather than specific to social class, gender, culture, and race. All homes provide knowledge valuable in some respects while it remains limited and distorted from a more objective perspective.

Footnotes

1

This paper is forthcoming in Teachers College Record. It has been improved through many discussions with our students and colleagues, including Jere Brophy, Doug Campbell, David Cohen, Eugenio Echeverria, Hyacinth Evans, Susan Florio-Ruane, Don Freeman, Jim Gavelek, Richard Navarro, Hreinn Palsson, Denis Phillips, Jonas Soltis, Alan Tom, and John Zeuli. Zeuli also assisted in locating and providing the initial review of several bodies of literature.

2

Robert Floden is a senior researcher with the Conceptual Analytic Project and is professor of teacher education and educational psychology at Michigan State University. Margret Buchmann is coordinator of the project and John Schwille is a senior researcher with the project. Buchmann is associate professor and Schwille a professor of teacher education at MSU.

3

Our proposal that schools should provide breaks with everyday experience is an extension of the roles that some sociologists believe schools play in social development. Parsons (1959), for example, points out that elementary classrooms are organized in ways that tend to separate children from the roles assumed in their families: "The old familial identification is broken up . . . and a new identification is gradually built up, providing . . . the child's identity apart from his originally ascribed identity as son or daughter of the 'Joneses'" (p. 310). Dreeben (1968) likewise emphasizes the fact that schools teach norms different from those of the family, such as the idea that some situations call for treating people alike regardless of their relationship to one's own family or local group.

4

Arguments for disciplinary understanding as a central educational goal resemble our general case for breaks with everyday experience (e.g., Hirst, 1974; Peters, 1965, Ch. 5). Strike (1985), for instance, relates learning the disciplines to both freedom and objectivity:

> The disciplines are not the sole repositories of human thought. But they are among the most powerful, and they have a unique potential to liberate us from the limitations and narrowness of those common forms of thought which we acquire informally from our culture. The claim that disciplines have to a central role in education is that they provide a degree of objectivity about and distance from our common understandings which liberates us. (p. 268)

5

If children come to school speaking a minority language, children who speak only the dominant language could learn the minority language at the same time the minority children learn the dominant language. Likewise, all children with dialects could be given some practice in dialect switching. This practice would be particularly beneficial to children whose spoken dialect most resembles the dominant standard form. All would see dialect switching as a feasible and desirable way to increase the range of language expression. All could better understand the general principles of sociolinguistics, or grammar, or what ever underlying structure is considered to be important for children to learn. In this way bilingual educational or bidialectical education is not only the means for maintaining the minority culture, but also a vehicle for developing a less idiosyncratic, contextualized view of language in general.

6

The limited long-term value of training tied so closely to a specific occupational content has empirical support. A review of the literature on vocational education (Woods & Haney, 1981), for example, concludes that, although vocational education programs (which typically tie content into a local work context) seem successful in keeping students in school, it is unclear whether staying in school is beneficial for these students. The jobs they obtain do not seem significantly better than the jobs of dropouts and their academic preparation does not facilitate pursuit of higher education.

7

Cognitive psychologists, for example, have found that the contents of human memory must be organized by relationships among concepts and beliefs to be recalled and used (e.g., Ausubel, 1968; Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977) and that comprehension is achieved through using such relationships (e.g., Anderson, 1977; Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Bruner, 1973).

8

Perhaps Smith's occasional tendency to think of sense making as all-or-none has roots in the psychological studies he cites. In word- or letter-recognition studies, either the letters are recognized or they are not. In problem-solving studies, there is a sharp transition to problem solution, often accompanied by a sudden burst of insight. Topics studied in school (e.g., the concept of number), however, can make different degrees of sense.

9

The fear of losing a way of living can have many effects on educational reform. Cohen (1976) shows how this emotion (with reference to an imagined past) invades and animates the supposedly rational world of policymaking in the United States.

10

Recent reports of classroom ethnographies (Au & Jordan, 1981; Philips, 1983) have argued that minority children are handicapped by teaching methods that are not congruent with the children's subcultures. Zeuli and Floden (1986) consider the possible educational implications of these studies and conclude that they do not provide a compelling argument for abandoning the educational goal of providing breaks with everyday experience.

11

The difference between our position and Dewey's obtains primarily at the elementary-school level; Dewey is more ready to endorse schooling divorced from everyday experience at the secondary-school level (i.e., after about age 12).

12

Dewey gives more specific reasons for stressing the principle of continuity in instructing younger children in "The Child and the Curriculum," (Dewey, 1902/1964) when he discusses the three evils of an approach that breaks sharply with everyday experience: that the child sees subject matter as merely abstract, that motivation drops off because obvious relevance is lacking, and that academic subjects must be distorted to be taught to young children. We have addressed the first two evils. Dewey's criticism of the third evil may be more applicable to what was typically taught in the schools of his day than to what might be taught (and sometimes is taught) today. For example, we now know that elementary school children can be taught the basic principles of logic (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980).

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